Adult Literacy Contact Centre NEWSLETTER

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A project of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C.

Faris Report Calls for Cooperation

A report on adult/continuing education in B.C. says that, "Unclear legislation, lack of a policy framework, an inadequate database/reporting system, and inequitable funding systems have created strains in a program area where cooperation and coordination among providers is necessary if the learner is to be well served."

Lifelong Learning for the 21st Century was commissioned to make recommendations to ensure that "the future development of adult/ continuing education generally, and adult basic education (high school completion) specifically, meets the learning needs of adults for the 21st century."

The report was prepared for the Ministry of Education and Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights by consultant Dr. Ron Faris, who was formerly Executive Director, Continuing Education Division, B.C. Ministry of Education (until 1986) and an Associate Executive Director of the National Literacy Secretariat.

The issue which triggered the report was the provincial government decision, in 1986, to transfer the locus of responsibility for school district adult basic education (high school completion including adult English as a second language [ESL] programs) from the Ministry of Education to the newly-created Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT). In that year, responsibility for the education of all adults except those in adult secondary school completion, the General Educational Development (GED) challenge exam, and some adult ESL programs, was transferred to the MAETT. Before 1986, one ministry held responsibility for all formal education, from kindergarten to university.

In a two-phase process, all adult ESL became the responsibility of the MAETT effective September 1991, while responsibility for all other adult education programs leading to secondary school completion was to be consolidated within the MAETT by the 1992/93 school year. However, in December 1991, the government put the final transfer phase on hold,

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subject to further consultation. Both ministries will continue to share responsibility for adult/ continuing education during 1993/1994.

The Faris report contains 27 recommendations, which encompass four areas: a provincial lifelong learning framework; equity/access issues; guaranteed quality programs and services; and responsiveness to community needs.

Some of the recommendations from the report are:

❖ the MAETT as the locus of responsibility for adult and continuing education in B.C.

❖ a statute or a joint ministerial statement of a commitment to the principle of lifelong learning

❖ a standing interministry coordination committee on adult/continuing education, to include ministries with an interest in adult learning such as Social Services, Recreation and Housing, Women's Equity, Aboriginal Affairs, Labour and Consumer Services, etc.

❖ a common credential for graduates of adult basic education (high school completion) to replace the four certificates now available

❖ appropriate, equitable levels of funding for both school district and college adult basic education (high school completion) programs

❖ tuition-free adult basic education at colleges as well as school districts

❖ a comparable reporting system on participation and financial data for colleges and school districts

❖ pilot community learning councils in several B.C. communities

❖ multi-agency, multi-purpose community learning centres

❖ increased support for the Open Learning Agency

One recommendation is already in place: a committee made up of representatives from both Ministries has been established to address the issues raised in the report. The committee will be assisted by an advisory group which will invite feedback on the issues from the adult/continuing education community. Details of this process are to be announced.

The report was distributed to all B.C. school board chairpersons and college/institute presidents in October.

A limited number of copies is available from:

Independent Schools Branch
Ministry of Education
3rd Floor
620 Superior Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8W 2M4
Phone: 356-0432
Fax: 356-0580 ❐

The Bar Examines "Legal Literacy"

A Canadian Bar Association (CBA) study, which looked at the relationship between the law and literacy, calls for lawyers to strengthen links with literacy organizations in an effort to communicate with clients with low literacy skills.

Reading the Legal Word: Literacy and Justice in Canada, is the final report of the CBA's Task Force on Legal Literacy, established by the CBA in 1990 in response to its concerns about the impact of literacy on the legal profession. The report, funded by a grant from the National Literacy Secretariat, was presented by Task Force Chair Laird Hunter at the CBA's annual meeting in Ottawa in August 1992.

The focus of the Task Force was to examine "how limited literacy hampers people in their efforts to recognize and solve legal problems and gain access to justice." (The Task Force chose the phrase "limited literacy" over "illiteracy" because it conveys "a more accurate picture of the people involved and [helps] to emphasize the fact that reading and functioning with printed materials actually require a range of literacy skills, especially in the legal world.")

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To research the report, the Task Force surveyed the experiences of both the literacy and legal communities.

It conducted interviews with 40 literacy workers across Canada, which provided information about: the number of times adult learners asked questions about the law and the legal system, and the type of assistance or information most often requested by learners. This was followed by meetings with 24 focus groups of current and former adult learners, to determine what barriers they faced in obtaining legal services and the strategies they used to overcome these obstacles.

Two of the findings that emerged from the research within the literacy community are:

❖ adults with limited literacy are intimidated by the legal system and avoid initiating legal action

❖ adults with limited literacy do not perceive that lawyers and the legal system are there to help them

Within the legal community, the Task Force commissioned a national survey of 1,000 lawyers to determine their perceptions and attitudes towards literacy. It also conducted in-depth interviews with 12 law firms across the country "that had altered their procedures to provide better service to clients with limited reading and writing skills."

Three of the findings from the research with the legal community are that:

❖ More than seven lawyers in ten (73 per cent) have had experience with a client or witness with limited literacy.

❖ Lawyers are not yet aware of the extent to which people with limited literacy skills have serious problems ... using legal information and the legal system.

❖ Lawyers presume a level of background competence in identifying legal problems that people with limited literacy skills do not have.

The Task Force concluded that, "there is a surprising lack of awareness among lawyers that limited literacy interferes with access to justice. This is consistent with the profession's perception of literacy as a personal issue and not a social issue."

The report's 27 recommendations include:

❖ Lawyers should communicate in plain language and, especially for clients with limited literacy, lawyers need to prepare documents using a plain language style and then explain those documents in a simple and practical way.

❖ Lawyers should inform themselves of the activities and services of intermediaries operating in their community, including literacy organizations and public legal education groups....

❖ Continuing legal educators should work with public legal educators and literacy educators to identify effective practice methods that will enable lawyers to provide more effective legal service to clients with limited literacy skills.

❖ Those responsible for the preparation and production of public legal education materials should collaborate with literacy organizations to develop materials that address the dual nature of legal literacy: ability

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Adult Literacy Contact Centre Newsletter

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1-800-663-1293 Toll-free in B.C.

684-0624 Lower Mainland

684-8520 Facsimile

The Adult Literacy Contact Centre is a project of the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C. and is jointly funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology; and the National Literacy Secretariat.

The Centre welcomes receiving your literacy news by phone, fax or mail. We reserve the right to edit written submissions for the newsletter.

The newsletter is published monthly and mailed during the first week of every month. It is available free of charge to any individual or agency upon request.

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to read and familiarity with the legal context.

To order a copy of the report, contact:

The Canadian Bar Association
902 - 50 O'Connor Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 6L2
Phone: (613) 237-2925 ❐

Plain Language Study Targets Social Service Documents

Government application forms for financial assistance -- such as welfare and unemployment insurance -- and documents relating to work benefits, rents, pensions, and personal finances, cause the most difficulty for clients of B.C. community service agencies, a recent study has found.

The study, *Language Issues for Service Agencies and their Clients*, was commissioned by the Plain Language Institute (PLI) of B.C. to identify the problems faced by people who have difficulty understanding the documents used in today's society. The research was conducted for the PLI by the Farrell Research Group Ltd. (of Vancouver) and submitted to the PLI in August 1992.

The PLI is an incorporated not-for-profit society founded in 1990, funded by the B.C. Ministry of the Attorney General and the Law Foundation of B.C., to promote plain language in government, business and the legal community.

The study was based upon two methods of research. The first, qualitative phase, was conducted to ascertain the nature of the issues faced by workers and their clients. Six focus group sessions were held with workers and administrators from service agencies across B.C. Each group consisted of employees of or volunteers with agencies serving different needs. (A seventh focus group was also conducted, comprised of experts in adult literacy.)

The second research phase consisted of a quantitative survey to establish the extent of the concerns discovered in the focus groups.

To conduct the survey, the research group analyzed 225 responses received from questionnaires mailed to a list of 710 service agencies throughout B.C.

The types of services provided by the agencies researched included:

- personal counselling
- legal, employment, and immigration counselling/ information
- advocacy
- educational/referral services
- literacy training
- parole services

Among the study's conclusions and recommendations are:

- " 'The System' is failing the people it is supposed to be helping. Some of the time, bureaucracies may be choosing to hide behind the rules, so that, in some cases, they do not have to deal with the problems clients bring to them."

- "Priority documents for change should include those documents ...basic to the survival and safety of the clients. Such documents would include all forms of financial support, housing, human rights and consumer rights."

- "...the people primarily responsible for taking action should be those who are putting out the forms. In particular, government agencies and crown corporations should be playing a significant role, since these are the sources from which most of the documentation affecting clients is generated."

For further information, contact:

The Plain Language Institute of B.C.
1500 - 555 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, B.C.
V6B 4N6
Phone: 687-8895
Fax: 687-0018 ❐

Latest ABE Articulation Update

The *Provincial Update on ABE Articulation* (Number 7, September 1992) has been published by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology. The document is an annual summary of the work of the ABE (Adult Basic Education) Steering Committee and its subsidiary working committees, made up of representatives from each B.C. community college.

ABE articulation is the process which: facilitates the transfer of students from one educational institution to another; sets course requirements for diplomas and certificates; and develops guidelines for the content of courses identified for different levels of certification.

The *Update* contains all the revisions to generic course outlines and the course equivalency charts, as well as any overall changes in policy or regulations governing the process.

Some minor recommendations, resulting from a review of the entire ABE Articulation process initiated in the fall of 1991, are reflected in this year's *Update*.

The *Update* has already been distributed to the field but additional copies may be obtained from:

Gwen Armstrong, Coordinator
Adult Basic Education
Urban Colleges and International Education Branch
2nd Floor
838 Fort Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4
Phone: 387-6176
Fax: 356-8851

Family Literacy Workshop

The topic of family literacy and how libraries can incorporate it into their services will be discussed at a workshop sponsored by the Greater Vancouver Library Federation (GVLF) in Burnaby on November 17, 1992.

Presenters at the workshop, called "Family Literacy and the Library," are Barbara Bate, University College of the Fraser Valley adult basic education instructor, and Kathy Brown, East Area Coordinator, Fraser Valley Regional Library.

The presenters will differentiate family literacy from traditional reading promotion, discuss the importance of family literacy goals, and describe eastern Fraser Valley family literacy programs.

The workshop is sponsored by the GVLF Children's Services Advisory Committee and the Literacy Advisory Committee.

The event will be held in the Program Room, Bob Prittie Metrotown Branch, Burnaby Public Library, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

For information, contact:

Rita Avigdor
Greater Vancouver Library Federation
110 - 6545 Bonsor Avenue
Burnaby, B.C.
V5H 1H3
Phone: 437-8441

1992 Learner Events

The 1992 *Learners Talking to Learners*, a summary of B.C.'s adult literacy learner events under the literacy cost-shared program during 1992, has been published.

The 48-page publication lists 26 events throughout the province. Added to this year's edition is a 12-page creative writing section, which includes some of the poems and stories learners submitted as part of the events.

"Everybody is here to learn something and everybody has different ways of looking at things, everyone gave a little bit and you can gain from other people's insights." - from East Kootenay Community College learner event

Copies are available through the Adult Literacy Contact Centre or:

Patty Bossort, Coordinator
Learner Events Advisory Committee
4280 Windsor Street
Vancouver, B.C.
V5P 4P4
Phone: 876-3780

1993/1994 Cost-Shared Applications

The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT) and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) invite applications for 1993/1994 B.C. literacy cost-shared project funding.

Grants for adult literacy projects have been funded through a cost-shared agreement between the MAETT and the NLS since 1987. A total of 41 projects were funded in B.C. for 1992/1993.

Groups eligible for funding include: community colleges, school districts, literacy organizations, professional associations, task forces and community groups.

The 1993/94 fund will provide financial support for the following types of projects:

- ❖ learning materials
- ❖ research
- ❖ access and outreach
- ❖ coordination and information sharing
- ❖ public awareness
- ❖ professional development opportunities for practitioners

The 1993/1994 "Criteria, Guidelines and Conditions" states that, "of particular interest this year are projects which address the needs of equity groups."

The definition of literacy used for funding purposes is "*the information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home and in the community*" (Statistics Canada, 1991). According to the application guidelines, this includes reading, writing and numeracy at the Fundamental, Intermediate and Advanced levels of the B.C. community college adult basic education delivery system.

The review process of the applications begins within the MAETT and the NLS. Then they are examined by an External Advisory Committee, comprised of B.C. literacy practitioners, which will review and prioritize proposals for quality, content, regional distribution, known government priorities, and relationship to the recommendations outlined in the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee (PLAC) report, December 1989. The External Committee will provide both government agencies with a prioritized list of proposals.

Applications must be received by both the NLS and the MAETT by:

February 1, 1993

The External Review Committee meeting will have been completed by the end of March 1993 and Mary Waddington, Provincial Literacy Coordinator, says "announcements of successful projects will be made after April 1993, subject to funds being made available."

The guidelines and application forms have been distributed to: all deans and directors of adult basic education programs; ABE coordinators of Continuing Education programs; Literacy B.C.; the Adult Basic Education Association of B.C.; the Pacific Association of Continuing Education; and the Adult Literacy Contact Centre. (Application forms are also available from Waddington and Souque, below).

Before submitting a proposal, all applicants should consult about their project with:

Mary Waddington
Provincial Literacy Coordinator
Ministry of Advanced, Education, Training and Technology
2nd Floor
838 Fort Street
Victoria, B.C.
V8V 1X4
Phone: 387-6174
Fax: 356-8851

or

Yvette Souque
B.C. Projects Officer
National Literacy Secretariat
Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1K5
Phone: (819) 953-5286
Fax: (819) 953-8076
[courier address:]
Room 11 H 15
25 Eddy Street
Hull, Quebec
K1A OM5 ❐